

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PFOR, TH, US

SUBJECT: THANAT KHOMAN'S FOREIGN TROOPS BILL

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: A) BANGKOK 7559; (B) BANGKOK 7633

SUMMARY

THANAT KHOMAN'S DRAFT BILL REQUIRING PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL BEFORE FOREIGN TROOPS CAN BE STATIONED IN THAILAND MAY SOON COME TO THE FLOOR OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA). WHILE THANAT HAS PRIVATELY AND PUBLICLY ARGUED THAT THE BILL WILL HELP REGULARIZE THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE AND PROTECT THAI SOVEREIGNTY, IT SEEMS A POORLY WRITTEN PIECE OF LEGISLATION DESIGNED MORE TO STIMULATE DEBATE ON THAI-AMERICAN RELATIONS. DESPITE THANAT'S ASSURANCES TO THE CONTRARY THE BILL, AS DRAFTED, WILL IMPACT ON AMERICAN FORCES ALREADY IN THAILAND. WE EXPECT THE BILL TO FAIL, BUT NLA DEBATE
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OF THE THANAT BILL MAY INITIATE THE NEXT PEAK OF CRITICAL

COMMENTS ON THAI-AMERICAN RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

1. THANAT KHOMAN, FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISOR TO PRIME MINISTER SANYA THAMMASAK, AND FOREIGN MINISTER UNDER THE THANOM GOVERNMENT, HAS CONDUCTED AN EXTENSIVE PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN SEEKING TO ABSOLVE HIMSELF FROM RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE AND APPOINT HIMSELF THE CHIEF CRITIC OF THE PRESENCE IN HIGH GOVERNMENT CIRCLES (REFS A AND B). AS ADVISOR TO THE PRIME MINISTER, THANAT REPORTEDLY HAS ARGUED FOR RE-EVALUATION OF THAI-AMERICAN RELATIONS AND FOR THE CABINET SPONSOR LEGISLATION TO SIGNAL A NEW INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY. HE APPARENTLY WAS UNSUCCESSFUL IN THIS QUEST.

2. AS A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, THANAT FILED A DRAFT BILL ON FOREIGN TROOPS WITH THE NLA SECRETARIAT MAY 16 APPARENTLY HOPING TO STIMULATE FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES IN THAI-AMERICAN RELATIONS. THE CABINET RESIGNATIONS OF MAY AND OTHER LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS HAS KEPT THE THANAT BILL FROM THE FLOOR OF THE ASSEMBLY.

THANAT'S BILL

3. THE BILL IS SIMPLE, STRONG IN ITS LANGUAGE, AND PROBABLY MORE INTENDED TO STIR DEBATE THAN BECOME LAW.

IT REQUIRES THAT BEFORE FOREIGN TROOPS CAN BE STATIONED IN THAILAND, THE GOVERNMENT MUST ACQUIRE PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL. IT APPEARS TO GO FURTHER THAN THE INJUNCTION IN ARTICLE 185 OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WHICH READS IN PART "ANY MILITARY ALLIANCE MUST OBTAIN THE APPROVAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY." THE BILL PLACES A CONSIDERABLE BURDEN OF PROOF ON THE GOVERNMENT AND REQUIRES THAT THE GOVERNMENT DEFEND ANY TREATY ALLOWING FOREIGN TROOPS INTO THAILAND ON THE BASIS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS, AS WELL AS DEFENSE. SUCH WORDING IS A DELIBERATE "RED HERRING" BECAUSE THAI FROM MANY WALKS OF LIFE ALLEGE

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THAT THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE CONTRIBUTES TO THE NUMBER OF BARS, PROSTITUTES, AND TO THE "MORAL DEGRADATION" OF THAI YOUTH. SECTION 4 OF THE DRAFT BILL, QUOTED BELOW, IS THE CLAUSE WHICH TARGETS THIS BILL AGAINST THE EXISTING AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE.

4. THANAT, HOWEVER, ASSURED THE DCM 29 MAY 1974 THAT HIS BILL WAS NOT DIRECTED AGAINST THE UNITED STATES. HE MADE

THE POINT IN THAT CONVERSATION THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE IN A MUCH STRONGER POSITION IF OUR MILITARY PRESENCE HAD THE BROAD SUPPORT OF THE THAI GOVERNMENT AND LEGISLATURE, RATHER THAN JUST THE TOP MILITARY LEADERSHIP. DISCUSSING HIS BILL AT A JULY 12 PRESS CONFERENCE THANAT EXPLAINED THAT THE BILL'S INTENT WAS NOT TO CHASE THE AMERICANS OUT, BUT TO "REGULARIZE" RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND THE UNITED STATES, AND TO ESTABLISH CORRECT AND PROPER CHANNELS OF COOPERATION. THANAT DENIED IN THE PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE WAS PUSHING FOR A STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT. HE MADE CLEAR IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE IS PLAYING TO THOSE WHO FEEL THAT THE AMERICAN MILITARY HAVE HAD TOO MUCH LATITUDE AND THAT THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT BARGAINED AWAY IMPORTANT PARTS OF THAI SOVEREIGNTY. THANAT AGAIN HIT THE "LOST SOVEREIGNTY" ISSUE IN AN ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN THE AUGUST 1974 /SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW".

5. THE SIGNIFICANT PARTS OF THE THANAT BILL, WHICH WE HAVE UNOFFICIALLY TRANSLATED, ARE AS FOLLOWS:

" SECTION 3:

AN AGREEMENT FOR STATIONING FOREIGN TROOPS IN THAILAND, FOR MILITARY PURPOSES, CAN ONLY BE CONSUMMATED AFTER NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY APPROVAL HAS BEEN RECEIVED. AND, TO ACQUIRE THIS APPROVAL, THE GOVERNMENT MUST SHOW THE POLITICAL, SECURITY, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO THE NATION. FURTHERMORE, THE GOVERNMENT MUST SUBMIT THE CONDITIONS OF SAID PROPOSED AGREEMENT WITH THE COUNTRY WHOSE FORCE WILL BE INSTALLED IN THAILAND, TO THE NLA SO THAT IT CAN FULLY CONSIDER THE BENEFITS TO THE PUBLIC BY THE INSTALLATION OF SUCH

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FOREIGN TROOPS IN THAILAND.

SECTION 4:

IN THE CASE THAT THE FOREIGN TROOPS HAVE ALREADY BEEN INSTALLED IN THAILAND, THE GOVERNMENT MUST TAKE ACTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONTENTS OF SECTION 3.

SECTION 5:

THE PRIME MINISTER SHALL HAVE CHARGE AND CONTROL OF THE EXECUTION OF THIS ACT."

COMMENT:

6. WHEN THE NLA BEGINS ITS FIRST READING OF THE THANAT BILL, CONSIDERABLE AND WIDE-RANGING DEBATE ON THE FLOOR AND IN THE PRESS ON THAI-AMERICAN RELATIONS SHOULD RESULT. THE BILL MAY COME TO THE FLOOR AS EARLY AS AUGUST 8, ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN ON THE NAL'S AGENDA SINCE MAY.

7. THE THANAT BILL AT PRESENT STANDS LITTLE CHANCE OF PASSAGE. THE CABINET HAS REPORTEDLY REJECTED A SIMILAR PROPOSAL AND SOME OF THE BILL'S SPONSORS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN NOW HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE INTENT AND TIMING OF THE BILL. DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNAWAN HAS PUBLICLY CRITICIZED THANAT'S BILL ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS. THE THAI MILITARY WOULD NOT BE PLEASED WITH LEGISLATIVE ASSERTIVENESS WHICH THREATENS WHAT THEY GENERALLY PERCEIVED AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THAILAND'S DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS.

8. THANAT'S STATED PURPOSE IN PUSHING HIS BILL IS TO "REGULARIZE" RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. WHILE WE BELIEVE HE IS NOT ANTI-AMERICAN PER SE, HE IS AN OPPORTUNIST AND SEEMS TO FEEL THIS ISSUE IS A USEFUL HORSE TO RIDE TOWARD HIS OWN POLITICAL AGGRANDIZEMENT. HE ALSO PROBABLY SEES THIS MANEUVER AS A WAY OF PLASTERING OVER HIS EARLIER ROLE IN THE INTRODUCTION AND BUILD-UP OF FORCES IN THE 1960'S.
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